

Linking the local and the transnational

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EDITORIAL

Linking the Local and the Transnational: Rethinking Memory Politics in Europe

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ABSTRACT *In this introductory article to the special issue on ‘Transnational Memory Politics in Europe,’ we argue for closer scrutiny of the dynamics between the local and the transnational realms of memory. We contend that thus far, scholarship has neglected empirical analysis of transnational mnemonic practices in Europe. We seek to provide a theoretical framework bringing together remembrance with research on globalization, governance, and transnationalism as a way of overcoming the often nation-centric nature of memory studies. The central puzzle for us is how memories are (trans)formed, displayed, shared, and negotiated through transnational channels, while maintaining their local rootedness. In particular, we focus on the construction of narratives that have the power to transcend national boundaries, as well as the role of individual and institutional actors in driving those narratives to (un)successful representation.*

KEY WORDS: remembrance, European Union, transnationalism, globalization, actors, institutions

Memory is locally grounded almost by definition. Anything we as individuals or collectivities choose to remember, to narrate to each other, to draw meaning from, is by necessity linked to the place and the time where it took place (or where it is imagined to have taken place). And yet, there has been a lot of talk—in both academic and policy circles—of ‘transnational memories,’ of the ‘universalization of the Holocaust,’ and of ‘the global commemoration of communism.’ How can remembrance—something that derives its power of persuasion and its motivation for action from its very rootedness—be understood in transnational terms? How can we take seriously both the local and transnational processes of memory politics and explore the complex ways in which they are linked and through which they shape one another?

This puzzle stands at the heart of this special issue on ‘Transnational Memory Politics in Europe.’ We have brought together studies that address this empirical and conceptual problem from different disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical vantage points. What unites these contributions is their analytical commitment to examining the transnational dynamics of European memory, as well as their manifestations in concrete local or institutional politics. Thus far, the relatively new scholarly field to which we want to contribute can be categorized by two main ways of addressing transnational memory

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politics. First, there have been many valuable collections of national and comparative case studies, which have provided the empirical groundwork needed to move beyond the confines of the nation-state (Wüstenberg 2014). Second, there have been numerous ambitious works arguing that we are witnessing the globalization or universalization of memory (Levy and Sznajder 2001; Rothberg 2009). We take a different approach here: we are interested in understanding the empirical processes that underscore the transnationalization of remembrance *in Europe specifically*. We focus on Europe, not because these dynamics are not present elsewhere—in fact, we argue that the various mechanisms of globalization are key—but because despite an arguably high level of mnemonic interconnectedness, transnationalization of remembrance in Europe has not received sustained scholarly attention. The authors in this special issue investigate in very concrete ways how transnational memory ‘works’. Moreover, while much has been written about the European Union (EU)’s need for a common past in order to advance integration (Assmann 2012; Eder and Spohn 2005; Leggewie 2011), there has been little published research on the *practices of transnational memory* in Europe.

In this introductory article, we bring together existing scholarship on European memory politics with the literature on globalization and global governance. Our goal is to provide a framework for rethinking the connection between local and transnational in the realm of public commemoration. We do not seek to bypass the national level, but we argue that what we know about the *national* level should not structure our interpretation of *transnational* memory politics.

Memory Between the Local and the Transnational

Narrating common historical experiences and referring back to shared memories of past events has been integral to community building for centuries. Memory is closely connected to collective identity formation and has been regarded as central to the formation of modern nation-states (Anderson 1983). Perhaps it is therefore not surprising that until relatively recently, the academic study of the confrontation with the past remained firmly situated within national boundaries. Despite the fact that many of the events that gave rise to controversial memories—wars, genocides, human rights abuses—have been global or regional affairs, their public remembrance has been regarded as taking place within the borders of the nation-state and as being driven primarily by domestic elites (i.e. Frei 2006; Gillis 1994; Romero and Varsori 2005). In this context, debates over the most appropriate way of remembering the past have been predominantly analyzed as expressions of power struggles between different social and political actors who claim political legitimacy within national borders. The public sphere plays a crucial role here. It constitutes the arena within which politicized and highly contested debates about the official interpretations of the past can take place. Since competition between different actors on the one hand and mediation between citizens and institutions on the other lies at the very heart of democracy, struggles over memory issues do not only have the power to mobilize the public but serve also to reaffirm the ‘*res publica*.’ Questions of democratic legitimacy and the viability of a public sphere with a transnational dimension have, of course, been hotly debated in the context of European integration. Memory politics should therefore be considered a policy field in which different actors load history with their specific interests and meanings. As they compete for dominance, the invention of common memories can lead

to the creation or affirmation of common values as a foundation for social or political communities (Wolfrum 1999).

Even though these dynamics have so far been analyzed mostly within the realm of the nation-state, they are arguably present at the supranational level as well. What has been overlooked by many existing studies is the fact that the national arena is no longer the only place where memory politics are made and memory policies are formulated. In 2001, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider applied theories of globalization and the paradigm of a 'second modernity' (Ulrich Beck) to the topic of Holocaust commemoration. They contended that far from being a particularizing force, Holocaust memory was experiencing a process of universalization, becoming a sort of public good that could be interpreted in different ways by people all across the planet. Others have paid increasing attention to the transnational dimension of memory processes particularly in the context of transitional justice and democratization (see Barahona de Brito, Aguilar, and Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001; Flacke 2004; Schwelling 2012). All of those studies tend to concentrate on the global, somewhat abstract, level. The EU as a specific policy arena has not received sufficient consideration so far. This is surprising considering the fact that Europe as a potential 'region of memory' has attracted sustained attention (see Müller 2002; Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006; Pakier and Stråth 2010).

The numerous edited volumes that have been published in the past years have without doubt been crucial in providing forums for exchange and the accumulation of comparative knowledge (Blaive, Gerbel, and Lindenberger 2011; Engel, Middell, and Troebst 2012; Langenbacher, Niven, and Wittlinger 2012). While there is much empirical work to build on in terms of single case studies, research on transnational memory politics is nevertheless as yet in its infancy. What is lacking is a systematic understanding of the transnational structures, agents, and practices that shape local, national, or transnational 'realms of memory' (Nora and Kritzman 1996). Most existing studies concentrate on comparisons between national cases without integrating them into the wider European framework. A genuine investigation of transnational memory linkages on the European level, comprising the analysis of cross-border social relationships of non-state and other actors, is still largely missing. Among the few exceptions are Kroh's (2008) study on the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research as transnational forum for memory negotiations, Elisabeth Kübler's (2012) account of memory politics within the Council of Europe, and Sierp's (2014) recent book *History, Memory and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions*. They are examples of a rather new approach in memory studies characterized by the in-depth investigation of the common characteristics, strategies, goals, and outcomes of transnational memory politics and what these can teach us about transnational relations more generally. They thus move away from the simple collection of case studies (with more or less obvious inter-/transnational components) that has dominated most research on memory politics so far.

This shift of scholarly attention brings with it a difficulty that lies in the subject matter of 'transnational memory' itself. There is a basic tension between processes of reckoning with historical events that are *rooted in particular places and social* structures (and which can be anchored in national, regional, or local institutions), and flows that transcend borders or involve transnational institutions. Our emphasis lies in the importance of recognizing the simultaneous *groundedness* of memory narratives in historical experience and imagination and its political and cultural *migration across borders*. This tension has led Assmann and Sebastian (2010) to propose a somewhat artificial distinction between

three levels of interpretation: a European or global public sphere that supplies an audience for mnemonic developments, the universalization of memory discourses, and the emergence of transnational memory coalitions. They also explicitly link the local and the global, writing that ‘While some memories are currently anchored on a national level in museums and monuments, others are exported across national boundaries.’ They suggest that memory is to be located at either the national or supranational level and that we need to explain how its location comes to change. The balance between local or national and transnational forces has been at the heart of the globalization debate since its inception (see Held 1999). The challenge in the context of memory studies arises from the difficulty of analyzing and theorizing how something that depends on concrete places and unique historical episodes is shaped by processes that are globalized and to understand how the local then molds the global in turn. The simple fact that memories, especially memories of past atrocities, are spatially grounded almost by definition creates considerable analytical problems in this context. The analysis of single local, national, or even global case studies can do very little to uncover those dynamics. Instead, what we need to investigate are the mechanisms by which memories are (trans)formed, displayed, shared, and negotiated through transnational channels, while maintaining their local rootedness. Only by placing the tension between local and supranational at the centre of inquiry, does it become possible to systematically investigate the role of memory actors and their cultural challenge in the context of European integration.

Narrative Construction and Agency

Two main elements constitute the focus of our attention in this context: the construction of narratives that have the power to transcend national boundaries and the role of individual and institutional actors in driving those narratives to (un)successful representation. In this context, it is also crucial to analyze how these actors are linked locally and across territorial, cultural, and institutional boundaries. Narratives are accounts of connected events that allow the addressee to interpret given situations and past developments. They give guidance and create a common frame of reference for groups of people bound together by historical, social, or institutional forces (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997). Narratives have been particularly important in the context of European integration where accounts of common socio-economic, historical, cultural, and political developments have been closely connected to the legitimation of an emerging transnational polity. Since the beginning of the European integration process, narratives have been used by the Union’s institutions to create a European memory with the aim to ground the unification project historically and to create the basis for a common identity. However, narratives do not emerge out of thin air; we are interested in studying how, by whom, and through which mechanisms they are constructed. In other words, we treat narrative construction as an important policy field in European integration. In her contribution to this special issue, entitled ‘Legitimation Through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration,’ Oriane Calligaro investigates how European institutions and their representatives have tried to create and promote a shared memory of the European integration process. She demonstrates that the promotion of a transnational European memory is subject to an increasingly ‘presentist’ approach that neglects historical accuracy in an attempt to anchor the EU’s legitimacy historically.

Over the years, the European Parliament has often been a venue for efforts to create a common European history. Particularly in the last decade, the EP has moved from the mere advocacy of symbolic politics to the active construction of shared European narratives. It has thus turned into one of the most important sites where memory entrepreneurs discuss remembrance at the European level. While the functioning of the EP as an arena for majoritarian decision-making on memory politics might have the power to produce political bonds and a sense of communality among EU citizens, the absence of a European public sphere puts serious constraints on the EP's influence. Wolfram Kaiser highlights the tension between institutional activities and missing public involvement in his article 'Clash of Cultures: Two Milieus in the European Union's "A New Narrative for Europe" Project.' He investigates the role that individual policy entrepreneurs played in initiating and embedding the 'New Narratives' project on the EP's agenda and their almost unbridgeable divergences when it came to writing 'a new narrative for Europe.'

The wide-spread institutional reluctance to expose memory projects to public scrutiny and debate is also subject of investigation of Veronika Settele's account 'Including Exclusion in European Memory? Politics of Remembrance at the House of European History.' Originally devised as a political initiative capable of portraying the Union's diversity by integrating multiple perspectives, Settele's analysis of the museum's conceptual documents shows that the planned permanent exhibition showcases a rather narrow understanding of Europe's divisive past. Historical experiences such as slavery, colonialism, and migration are largely excluded from an historical narrative that concentrates on the success story of European integration.

The purposeful exclusion of marginal voices and the selection of certain aspects of the European past raises questions concerning the capacities and constraints that different memory actors face when putting forward their version of history. The second pivotal aspect to an analysis of transnational memory politics in Europe is therefore agency. The main institutional venues of the EU where negotiations and discussions about a common culture of remembrance take place are the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the European Parliament, and the European Commission. These supranational institutions dealing with memory politics are faced by a myriad of 'memory entrepreneurs,' ranging from representatives of member states governments to non-state actors, all vying for attention and influence. Within those different European institutional arenas, both state and non-state actors that seek to challenge public narratives and policies of the past in public space reference concrete places and must confront the state institutions that govern them. The rise in the number and diversity of actors has become particularly pronounced since the end of the Cold War. These new 'memory entrepreneurs' began questioning some of the core European memory narratives of the post-war period (i.e. the uniqueness of the Holocaust) by calling for the recognition of Stalinism and Nazism as equal totalitarianisms. Laure Neumayer's contribution in this special issue 'Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: the Mobilizations Around the "Crimes of Communism" in the European Parliament' shows how contentious negotiations within the different European institutions have led to a 'memory adjustment' between the new and the old member states. She analyzes the constellation of different memory actors in order to shed light on the political, social, and institutional dynamics lying at the heart of struggles over history in Europe.

The investigation of the actual mechanisms at play in the different institutional venues uncovers the difficulty of conceptualizing the interaction between different memory

entrepreneurs. It is not sufficient to study actors: we need to understand how different actors—be they civic, intellectual, artistic, or institutional—are linked locally and across territorial, cultural, and institutional boundaries. Two research traditions—both emanating from the constructivist paradigm in international relations—are especially instructive for explicating how memory activists can become effective within transnational (governance) networks: research on norms and norm entrepreneurs and research on transnational civil society. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) in particular have provided pioneering work in the first arena, arguing that global normative change is characterized by a specific ‘life cycle.’ Especially during a first phase (norm emergence), norm entrepreneurs play the pivotal role of persuading states to adopt a particular principle. Memory activists are explicitly ‘norm entrepreneurs’ whose goal is to transform or institutionalize norms about the interpretation of history. Almost without fail, such activists state their desire to harness the ‘lessons’ of the past for the present and future—be it in the service of collective identity or democratization or human rights. Haas’ (1992) notion of ‘epistemic communities’ as networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain, has also done much to clarify how individuals impact transnational policy-making processes. Sebastian Büttner and Anna Delius’ essay on ‘World Culture in European Memory Politics? New European Memory Agents Between Epistemic Framing and Political Agenda-Setting’ investigates the extent to which European memory politics are driven forward by practices of cosmopolitan professionalism. By analyzing transnational memory agents as a particular epistemic community, it critically scrutinizes the scientized and rationalized approach dominant in most transnational memory networks.

Research on transnational civil society and global governance puts a spotlight on the agents driving transnational processes and is thus highly relevant for the analysis of dynamics on the European level. While the two have at times been juxtaposed as rival approaches, the recent trend has been to view transnational civil society as integral to new patterns of governance by state and private actors (see Taylor 2002; Kern 2004). With *Activists beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink (1998) have spawned a whole host of studies devoted to understanding how civic activists work through agenda setting, norm creation, policy influence, network formation, and persuasion to change state practice. The key for transnational activist networks is that authority can derive not from traditional clout but from expertise, information provision, moral influence, and legitimacy (Price 2003). These are also the foundations on which civic memory campaigners build their success in what Arjun Appadurai has termed ‘grassroots globalization’ (Appadurai 2000). As Batliwala (2002) notes, globalization has not only exposed a democratic deficit in international institutions, but has also helped ‘create and expand access to an autonomous global civic space—a space that even the most authoritarian states and regimes, hostile to civil society, cannot control’ (395). One of these spaces is the one of leisure, entertainment, and recreation. Eleonora Narvselius in her article ‘Spicing up Memories and Serving Nostalgias: Thematic Restaurants and Transnational Memories in East-Central European Borderland Cities’ examines the commercialization of memory cultures as a transnational phenomenon. By studying how the contemporary populations of *Cracow, Wrocław, Lviv, and Chernivtsi* approach the past cultural diversity, she highlights how grassroots activism can lead to a radical re-imagining of cultural memories.

Memory entrepreneurs may not only share experiences and best practices, they can also support each other in cases where state actors remain resistant to confronting the past.

In this context, it is crucial to understand the relationships that develop between various types of actors and institutions as they advocate for particular narratives about the past. Two transnational organizations have recently become major players in European mnemonic policy and are discussed by several articles in this collection: the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS) and the Platform European Memory and Conscience (Platform). The ENRS and the Platform might be understood as hybrids: comprising elements and funding from national governments, civil society, and supranational entities and displaying characteristics of both international organizations and non-state actor networks. As Sørensen and Torfing (2007) contend, governance networks are a response to

processes that are no longer fully controlled by the government, but subject to negotiations between a wide range of public, semi-public and private actors, whose interactions give rise to a relatively stable pattern of policy making that constitutes a specific form of regulation, or mode of coordination (3–4).

The network structure enables the participation of a diverse set of actors with potentially important consequences for their democratic legitimacy, while allowing the state to ‘govern at a distance’ (6). Thus, we contend that, rather than examining EU institutions and ‘outside’ actors separately, it is more fruitful to focus on the ways in which they are linked.

Because diverse actors’ domestic and transnational memory practices are usually not organized in a hierarchical manner, and have a tangible impact on the state’s capacity to govern collective memory, the network approach is particularly suitable. Such a relational perspective for understanding the role of power in politics can account for ‘interdependence among actors and institutions’ (McClurg and Young 2011). Network analysts highlight the character of the links that bind members of a network, be they information, affection, finances, or historical experiences (Wetherell 1998; Siegel 2011). Oliver Plessow’s article ‘The Interplay of the European Commission, Researcher and Educator Networks and Transnational Agencies in the Promotion of a Pan-European Holocaust Memory’ traces how supranational institutional actors support and rely on already existing networks of experts in research, memorialization and education. By investigating the structural conditions that mark the Europeanization of the Holocaust memory discourse in the educational sphere, he analyzes the tools that EU institutions and transnational memory networks use to propagate a pan-European memory.

Conclusion

Analytical frameworks derived from scholarship on global governance, norm diffusion, and transnational civil society provide new approaches to unpacking the local and the transnational in memory politics. The articles assembled here offer innovative theoretical and empirical insights that go beyond abstract and normative perspectives, which have dominated this area of research thus far. They are organized according to the two main themes through which we seek to address the local-transnational nexus. In the first set of articles, European remembrance is analyzed as a policy field in which the construction of narratives takes place. These narratives are the result of contention between individual and institutional actors who use various rhetorical and material resources for the articulation of

norms, interests, divergent political cultures, and practices. The second set of articles focuses on how actors at different levels (local, national, supranational) cooperate and compete, sometimes bypassing 'official' channels of policy-making on memory, sometimes shaping them in the process. The authors highlight not only the agency behind the construction of public commemoration, but also how those agents are linked in intricate and consequential ways. The contributors investigate transnational politics of remembrance using a variety of methods, thus moving beyond single-country and comparative studies. Approaches employed include ethnographic research, qualitative network analysis, elite interviews, and policy analysis, among others. In sum, this special issue addresses the nexus between transnational politics of remembrance, European integration, and local or institutional memory initiatives. Our goal is to contribute to a novel understanding of how symbolic politics are negotiated and implemented at the transnational level and how they are translated into local, national, and supranational practices.

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